

DHS completes investigation of anti-terrorism and disaster response program at Quigley's request

CHICAGO — Today, U.S. Representative Mike Quigley (IL-05) announced the results of a Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Inspector General investigation he requested which found Cook County's Project Shield program mismanaged \$45 million in federal grant funding that was intended to support first responder efforts during acts of terrorism and other disasters.

"This is one of the strongest and most indisputable assessments I've ever seen from a federal inspector," said Rep. Quigley. "It's clear that if proper checks and balances are not embedded into projects to ensure accountability from the start, investments like Project Shield can turn into a scandal. Misusing taxpayer dollars on a highway project leaves us with less money, but misusing taxpayer dollars on a homeland security effort leaves us less safe as well. I commend the current Cook County administration for shutting the program down and hope that those responsible for this past misconduct are held accountable."

The DHS report issued this week concluded that Project Shield funds "were not spent efficiently or effectively" and that "Cook County did not adequately plan or manage the project to ensure that: the equipment worked properly; the system could be operated in an emergency situation." The report also states that "Cook County did not always comply with ... requirements," finding "missing records, improper practices, unallowable costs, and unaccountable inventory items" upon investigation.

The Project Shield audit stemmed from many years of scrutiny by Rep. Quigley. While serving for a decade on the Cook County Board, then-Commissioner Quigley expressed repeated concerns about the serious mismanagement of the program by then-County President Todd Stroger's previous administration. Once elected to Congress, Rep. Quigley took his fight to the federal level and in September 2009, sent a letter to the Government Accountability Office requesting their review. On October 2, 2009, Quigley requested an investigation by the Department of Homeland Security. The following week, he was joined by then-Representative and now-Senator Mark Kirk in a second, bipartisan letter to DHS requesting the same.

Project Shield was intended to enable first responders to capture and share video and data from the wireless-equipped first responder vehicles or base station monitors throughout Cook

County. Between 2003 and 2009, Cook County was reimbursed approximately \$45 million from federal Urban Areas Security Initiative grant funds for equipment installation and maintenance. The project has been continuously plagued by technical equipment glitches, issues with subcontractors, and concerns that the project lacked adequate oversight and accountability.

A [joint investigation by the *Chicago Sun-Times* and NBC5](#) in October 2009 revealed that Project Shield was already 36 percent over budget at the time, and much of the equipment, specifically the cameras in responder vehicles, was completely inoperable while other equipment had not been installed at all. In addition, Project Shield posed a danger to law enforcement officers in the field, who could be injured by in-car camera and computer equipment that would become projectiles should airbags be deployed.

The DHS report also found that cameras purchased through Project Shield were placed in police parking lots and mounted in police station lobbies, providing "questionable homeland security benefits." The dysfunctional equipment even prevented some first responders from accessing critical databases from their vehicles needed to check criminal records and warrants, according to the report.

The *Chicago Sun-Times* and NBC5 reported in February 2011 that the [FBI has begun a criminal investigation](#)

into Project Shield.

[Project Shield was terminated](#)

by new Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle in June 2011, nearly three years after it was scheduled for completion.

A full copy of the DHS Inspector General's report can be found [here](#).

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